

City of Beverly Hills

SEP 20 2011

PLANNING DIVISION
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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September 16, 2011

Design Review Commission
City of Beverly Hills
455 N. Rexford Dr.,
Beverly Hills, CA 90210.

Dear Commissioners:

As you suggested at the September 13 meeting, I am sending my remarks made at that meeting in letter form.

As the person that was singularly responsible for the Planning Commission actually taking up the “bulky house” issue, after the City Council recognized the problem, and as one of those on the committee that studied the issue for the Planning Commission (and attending every meeting), I can say with some degree of authority that being ‘consistent with surrounding homes’ is *not* a proper criteria for you to consider. It should be removed as a criteria for your approval. (I speculate that a well-meaning staff person created a checklist without thinking through the variables of the reality in light of the purpose of the ordinance.) The purpose of the ordinance is to not have more bulky, boxy houses, not to allow more bulky houses if there is already one nearby. That criteria very likely (depending on the street) results in creeping bulk. I am not suggesting that you have a practice of approving bulk if there is a bulky house nearby. But I think that criteria, because there is a bulky, boxy house next to 163 N. Hamel, led (consciously or unconsciously) to approval of what I consider a much more bulky house than was originally proposed for 163 N. Hamel.

The notice procedure ought to be revised. Neighbors should be notified any time there is a change to the façade. The process of 163 N. Hamel is a good case study. Based on the archived video and my experience, this is what happened: Neighbors were notified. I went down and looked at the plans and rendering. The façade looked OK to me because there was a half-found area that broke up the bulk; I did not criticize the appearance. Then the next meeting the owner came with a plan that did not have that rounded area on the façade—but

no neighbors knew that a very significant change was now proposed for consideration.

Therein lies a major flaw in the process. Had I known of the change I would have looked at the revised proposal, and I would have voiced strong opposition. (The project is well under way, and I do not suggest it be stopped and rebuilt—I use it as an example.) A “re-notice” does not have to necessarily slow the applicant’s progress—the owner controls the time of submission and all he/she has to do is submit new renderings ~10+ days in advance so staff can promptly send out a short “re-notice” and allow time to receive comments.

I also urge that with every notice (written or electronic, the original notice and any re-notice) a copy of the applicable rendering be included. Notice is to a rather limited group (more limited than what I voiced to the study committee), so this is not a big copy job and envelopes are being ‘stuffed’ anyway with the notice. Sending a copy of the rendering will make participation by neighbors much easier and therefore more effective. I think your suggestion to have a mechanism for anyone interested in a project to give their e-mail address to receive notice is wonderful (but the first notice must go by mail to all to whom notice is required—one cannot express interest without first knowing the project is being considered); and the e-mail notice can and should include a copy of the rendering(s). I, personally, do not care for the idea of notice by smart phone, largely because I do not use a smart phone; but as an additional option no one can complain.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arnie Sklar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "S".

Arnie Sklar